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Exposure of Soviet missile threat vetoed by CIA

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WITH the Reagan Administration becoming increasingly alarmed at what it describes as spreading "pacifism, neutralism and anti-nuclearism" in Europe, Mr Weinberger, Defence Secretary, wants to reveal secret information showing deployment of the Soviet SS-20 missiles targetted on the Nato countries.

But CIA intelligence experts, and Mr Weinberger's own department will not permit it.

They have told him that such disclosures would be too revealing about American intelligence-gathering and photo-reconnaissance techniques.

The Russians could respond by switching the missiles to other sites.

The dispute follows two briefings Mr Weinberger gave European Defence Ministers in April and May when he vividly demonstrated the SS-20 threat.

Evidence of danger

The ministers were said to be so impressed with the quality of the American intelligence and photographic evidence that they urged Mr Weinberger to make public as much of it as possible.

The Reagan Administration has been striving for months

to convince Europe that the Soviet threat is such that there should be no half-heartedness in deployment of the Cruise and Pershing missiles.

But Mr Weinberger's pleas to make public data, maps and photographs of the Soviet arsenal met with immediate resistance.

The pace at which the Russians have been producing and deploying the missiles is alarming, according to American officials.

In January, the Defence Department reported that there were 180 SS-20s in place. In April, Mr Weinberger said the number had grown to 220, and the total is now estimated to be between 235 and 250, each with three warheads. In another development, Mr Weinberger has denied reports that he is about to recommend a totally new system for the projected MX intercontinental ballistic missile.

The reports said that after all the rows over where to house the missiles on the ground or on submarines, the defence department would put them aboard converted jet transport aircraft for air-launching.